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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAGHDAD 004110

SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: IECI REACHES OUT TO KIRKUK

Classified By: Political Counselor Robert Ford for reasons 1.4(b) and (d)

1. (C) SUMMARY. Sunni Arab leaders in Kirkuk told an Independent Electoral Commission of Iraq (IECI) delegation September 28 that the large increase in Kurdish voter registration was fraudulent and demanded an investigation. IECI commissioners Hamdia Muhammad and Adil Allami assured these Sunni Arab leaders and provincial government leaders that IECI would conduct an audit of Kirkuk voter registration records and invited Kirkuk leaders to observe the audit in Baghdad. Regarding the elections crimes provision in the new election law, IECI commissioners explained that those who vote twice or stuff ballot boxes face imprisonment. The IECI commissioners solicited help from Kirkuk leaders to get the word out to the public to report any irregularities, including ballot tampering or intimidation, and stressed their commitment to hold free and fair elections. (See paragraph 7 for a complete list of Kirkuk participants). END SUMMARY.

Kirkuk Government Leadership Meeting

2. (C) Commissioner Hamdia Muhammad began the September 28 meeting by telling the multi-ethnic Kirkuk government leadership, including the governor and provincial council representatives, about the new electoral law. She explained the provision on elections crimes in detail: voting twice or stuffing ballot boxes were elections crimes punishable by imprisonment. IECI Chief Executive Officer and Commissioner Adel Allami said that, as recommended by elections experts, IECI would audit the controversial surge in Kirkuk registrations to ensure that new registrations were legitimate. Both commissioners stressed IECI's commitment to hold free and fair elections.

3. (C) Provincial council member Ali Mehdi (Turcoman) said that the 227,000 new registrations in Kirkuk represented an incredible 49 percent increase in the Kirkuk voter roll and was 10 times the increase in the number of the voters in Baghdad. He threatened to withdraw the Turcomans from the political process if IECI did not carry out its promised audit. Council member Rakan Said (Sunni Arab) pointed out that one registration center suspiciously recorded 4,000 new voters in one day. Council member Muhammad Kamal (Kurd) was less enthusiastic about the voter registration audit. He claimed Kurds, including those previously deported to Iran, have started to return to Kirkuk in large numbers, and any investigation that specifically targeted Kurdish areas would be unacceptable. All participants united in accusing the IECI Kirkuk office of incompetence and corruption. Provincial Council Chairman Rizgar Ali Hamajan (Kurd) called for an investigation of IECI employees in Kirkuk, and demanded ethnically representative IECI management in Kirkuk. Commissioner Allami noted that Kirkuk leaders have never been able to agree on a candidate to lead IECI Kirkuk, and once again invited the leaders nominate a candidate acceptable to all parties.

Kirkuk Sunni Arab Leaders

4. (C) In a separate meeting, Sunni Arab leaders from Kirkuk raised concerns about what they saw as fraudulent Kurdish registration during August 2005. Provincial Council member Rakan Saeed, for example, claimed that many Kurds recently arrived from Iran and Turkey had registered without proper documentation or identification. Although none of the Sunni Arabs had proof, they all supported this claim. A local community leader, Ali Abid Muhammad, echoed the sentiments of several attendees who feared outsized Kurdish registration would marginalize Sunni Arabs. Commissioner Allami assured the group that voter registration records in Kirkuk would be brought to Baghdad for an audit and invited political party representatives to come to Baghdad to observe the audit.

5. (C) Sunni Arab leaders demanded greater Sunni representation on IECI's Kirkuk staff. Several Sunni Arab provincial council members warned the IECI of their "historic responsibility" to ensure legitimate elections. In response, IECI Commissioner Hamdia Muhammad called for their help in reporting credible allegations of ballot tampering or intimidation. She explained the new IECI

system available online to report such abuses.

16. (C) COMMENT. This Kirkuk visit is the second stop in the Embassy-organized IECI outreach program to five Sunni areas (Ramadi, Kirkuk, Mosul, Fallujah, and Tikrit) to address deep Sunni suspicions against IECI, and to encourage Sunni-IECI dialogue. IECI commissioners continue to praise Embassy facilitation of this important outreach program and commented that the Kirkuk trip was a success. As this visit demonstrated, there are many deep-seated suspicions among the Sunni Arabs, and other Iraqi communities as well. END COMMENT.

17. (C) List of Kirkuk Participants:

Kirkuk Governor and Provincial Council Meeting

Kurds (invited):

'Abd-al-Rahman Mustafa Fattah, Kirkuk Governor (Kirkuk Brotherhood List (KBL)/independent)
Rizgar Ali Hamajan, Provincial Council Chairman (KBL/PUK)
Kamal Muhammad, Provincial Council Member (KBL/KDP)
General Sherko Shaker, Kirkuk Police Chief
Representative of Brigadier General Anwar Hamed Amen

Kurds (not invited, but participated in meeting):

Ihsan Gili, Kirkuk Mayor (KDP)
Hassib Rozhbayani, Head of Kirkuk Government Resettlement and Compensation Committee (KDP)
Ali Qadir, KBL Spokesperson (PUK)
Dr. Adnan Obed Kirkuki, KBL Spokesperson (KDP)
Mahmood Muhammad, Provincial Council Member (KDP)

Turcomans:

Ali Mehdi, Provincial Council Member (Iraqi Turcoman Front (ITF)/Turcoman Eli Party)
Qasim Hamza, Provincial Council Member (ITF/Turcoman Loyal Party)
Irfan Jamal Kirkukli, Provincial Council Member (KBL/Iraqi Turcoman People's Party)

Sunni Arabs:

Burhan Muzhir Assi Al-Ubedi, Provincial Council Member (Iraqi Republican Gathering(IRG)/IRG)
Rakan Saeed Ali Al-Jabburi, Provincial Council Member (IRG/Independent)
Ahmed Khidhir Gharb, Provincial Council Member (IRG/IRG)
(Note: All Sunni Arab council members were invited to this meeting. Three of the six attended. End Note.)

Chaldo-Assyrian:

Edward Orah, Assistant to Kirkuk Governor

Sunni Arab Meeting

Khidhr Akber Hassan, Kirkuk University Professor
Ahmed Shihab Ahmed, Imam, Hawijah
Ahmed Qadir, Writer (Human rights and law)
Sheikh Ibrahim Muhammad Khalef Al-Jumaily, Tribal Leader
Sheikh 'Abdallah Yassen Sultan Al-Luhebi, Tribal Leader
Muhammad Ibrahim Muhammad, Community Leader and Teacher (College of Administration and Economics)
Ali Abid Muhammad, Community Leader and Teacher (Secondary School)
Abdulbast Ali, Community Leader and Northern Oil Company Employee
Ahmed Hameed al-Ubaydi, Iraqi Republican Gathering Kirkuk Office Head and Arab Consultative Council Deputy Head
Dr. Hussein Sulayman Al-Jabburi, Current Arab Consultative Council Head
'Abd-al-Rahman Munsheed al-Ubaydi, Tribal Leader and Former Head of the Arab Consultative Council
Burhan Muzhir Assi Al-Ubedi, Provincial Council Member
Rakan Saeed Ali Al-Jabburi, Provincial Council Member
Ali Hamdi, Assistant to Kirkuk Governor
Mamduh Ahmed Hassan, Community Leader and English Language Teacher
Mustafa Ahmed, Coordinator of Iraqi Human Rights Organization
Khalilzad